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The Right to Freedom

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna"

"Freedom March-2" – cold spring gives way to hot events

After the Chernobyl disaster the spring in Belarus comes late. It is cold and snowy. Nor was the very day of March 15, the day of adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the day the "Freedom March-2" was held. But in spite of the weather more than 25 thousands of Belarusan citizens participated in the rally and mass-meeting.



The traditional slogans of the "Freedom March" for the continuation of negotiations between the authorities and the opposition "Negotiations, changes, victory!" and anti-integration, anti-presidential: "To Europe without Lukashenka!" "Belarus for Belarusans – Lukashenka go to Russia!" were followed by a new one "No Belarusan forces in Chechnya!" The participants of the "Freedom March-2" gathered at the Yakub Kolas Square, processed along Skaryna Avenue and Surganov street to the Bangalor Square where the mass-meeting and a concert of the popular Belarusan rock-groups "N.R.M" and "Neiro Dubel" took place.

The authorities took some preparations for the action. Alexander Lukashenka was very angry with the representatives of the Minsk City Executive Committee to permit the meeting after "the slaughter on October 17 last year." The words "A step left, step right from the law and we'll kick the blood out off you" is the clear evidence that it was he who gave a command to disperse the peaceful

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Minsk, 15 March 2000.

Chronicle

On 28 February, **the Vitsebsk Kastrychnitski District Court brought a verdict to an activist of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusan Popular Front – Anatol Bukachow. In July 1998 Anatol Bukachow wrote a letter in block capitals on behalf of non-existing organisation "Volnaya Belarus" (Free Belarus) and sent it to the local newspaper "Vitsbichy" the day before official musical festival "Slavyanski Bazar" was opened. In his letter Anatol Bukachow protested against squandering state funds in the way of organising pompous pro-Russian holidays. Anatol Bukachow demanded in his letter to stop festival or otherwise some organisers and participants of the festival could suffer. The editorial board of the newspaper handed this letter to the Committee for State Security (KGB). KGB was looking for "terrorists" almost one year and a half. In the 1999 autumn the KGB, God knows how, got interested in Anatol Bukachow's personality. They conducted a search in Anatol Bukachow's flat, and Anatol was called to the KGB where under pressure of investigators he confessed that it was he who wrote this letter. Court hearings were first fixed on 24 February but for the missing of the lawyer were postponed till 25 February. On 25 February Anatol Bukachow turned down the services of the official lawyer provided by the court and concluded an agreement with prominent and independent lawyer Uladzimir Shaikevich. Barys Khamaida, honourable member of the HRC "Viasna," participated in the process as a public defender. Court hearings were conducted all day long on February 25. And on February 28 the court brought its verdict to Anatol Bukachow. He was found guilty under art. 201.1 (p.1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus regardless the fact that his guilty was proved only by Anatol Bukachow's own testimonies. A. Bukachow was fined 50 minimum wages. In his concluding speech A. Bukachow said that his actions were pure political ones.**

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Without right to make a choice

On the eve of the "Freedom March-2" authorities are intimidating the youth

Students of the Minsk grammar school №9 addressed to the HRC "Viasna" with a statement about human rights violations in their educational establishment. It's said in the statement that they were presented following ultimatum by the administration of the grammar school: "Whether you take part in the action, which will be held in our school (was specially organised to prevent young people from participation in the "Freedom March-2") or you'll be expelled from the grammar school…"

It was not only example of such treatment of students in educational establishments of Minsk City. The HRC "Viasna" was reported that similar talks were conducted in other high schools and universities of Belarusan capital. For instance, students of the Management Academy were intimidated by disciplinary sanctions if they would participate in the opposition-organised action. There is one more example – it was even funny one: administration of one of the high schools planned to conduct a disco party on 15 March in the evening obliging all the students and teachers to take to take part in it (usually parties are held in the week ends.).

It is clear that the authorities are afraid of possible mass actions declared by opposition and try to prevent the youth from participation in these actions because of a fact that young people are the most active participants of opposition-organised actions.

"Freedom March-2" – cold spring gives way to hot events

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participants of the procession last year. The Minsk Executive Committee and Law-Enforcement agencies perceived the President's words in their own way. March 15 was announced a working day. The guarding of governmental buildings was enforced; main forces were located along the route of the procession. Unexpectedly in some places along this way "road maintenance work" began. In some of schools and other educational institutions of Minsk City disco and different amusement shows for students were organised.



A special team was organised by the "March" participants to keep order and neutralise provoking actions. In the whole the first action of the "Hot spring-2000" had no special incidents. Though before the "Freedom March-2" started a young man (later he turned out to be the 2nd year student of the Geography Department of the Belarus' State University Syargei Kazlow) rushed to the reporter of the Russian TV company NTV Alexander Kolpakov and hit him in the face. Kazlow claimed to disagree with the NTV interpretation of the war in Chechnya. The provoker was detained by the participants of the "Freedom March" not by militia. Among these people was Ales Danilchyk, a monitor of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna." The rally itself had no incidents and its participants kept their way. After the end of the "Freedom March-2" six of them were arrested but released in the evening of the same day.

During the meeting at the Bangalor Square well-known opposition politicians took floor. Among them were Deputy chairman of the United Civic Party Alexander Dabravolski, vice-speaker of the legitimate 13th Supreme Soviet Anatol Lyabedzka, ex-Prime Minister of Belarus Mikhail Chygir, head of the Belarusan Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Gramada" Mikola Statkevich, head of the Belarusan Popular Front Vintsuk Vyachorka, deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet Ludmila Graznova and others. Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus Hans-Heorg Wieck, USA ambassador to Belarus Daniel Speckhard, representatives of the Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, People in Need, human rights activists from Poland and Lithuania also took part in the "Freedom March-2." The same actions also were held in Brussels, Prague, Warsaw, Kiev and the largest cities of Belarus that day.

Tens of thousands of citizens of the Republic of Belarus unsatisfied with A.Lukashenka's regime took part in the "Freedom March-2." But no doubt the start of the "Hot spring-2000" announced by the Belarusan opposition as a complex of actions for independence of the Republic, democratic reforms and human rights became the first successful step towards independence. The authorities have seen and realised that all. Therefore the Minsk Executive Committee didn't permit to held the rally on the Freedom Day, celebrated by the Belarusan opposition on March 25, the day when the Belarusan Popular Republic was declared in 1918. But the people striving for freedom cannot be stopped by Lukashenka's regime, as well as none can stop spring coming with its flood.

Andrei NALIVA

In response she got tear-gas in face

Militiamen beat-up a woman that took part in the "Freedom March-2"

On 15 March Galina Rabyankova was going home after participation in the "Freedom March-2". Near the intersection of Varvashenya and Bagdanovich streets she by chance witnessed illegal actions of militia officers that were severely beating an unknown man. Two militiamen were slapping stranger's face and as a result of such "detention" the man was almost unclosed: only trousers and boots were on him... People who witnessed this scene were filled with indignation by this treatment of a poor man. Galina Rabyankova decided to take a picture of the scene of "detention." After she took some close-ups one of militiaman suddenly fell upon her and knocked her down. Mrs Rabyankova fell down and injured her arm. Then the militiaman began dragging her to his college saying: "She took a picture of us!" Militiamen snatched away a camera from G.Rabyankova's hands, took out a film from it and tore it off before eyes of G.Rabyankova and other witnesses. Then militia officers snatched G.Rabyankova's bag and began searching it. They found some labels "Freedom March-2" there. Having seen them militiamen began crying: "Belarusan Popular Front members should be trampled!" They humiliated Mrs Rabyankova using swearwords. G.Rabyankova tried to get to know the names of those "polite" militia officers but she failed. In response to her questions she got tear-gas in face.

Mrs Rabyankova was forced to address to the Human rights Centre "Viasna" for help after what had happened to her. A complaint was lodged and addressed to the Minsk Prosecutor's Office.

Information department of the HRC "Viasna"

Defended...

Andrus Bandarovich and Syargei Khadarkevich, students of a grammar school named after Yakub Kolas addressed with a statement to the Human Rights Centre "Viasna." They reported that two unknown men came up to them in metro station, tore away their jackets and signs advertising "Freedom March-2." Those strangers were, according to the statement, in camouflage uniform and resembled representatives of the pro-Fascist organisation Russian National Unity. Andrus and Syargei offered them to go to the nearest charge office. Friends were deeply surprised when in the metro station charge office they heard that they were detained for sticking on leaflets. Militiamen immediately took away students' bags and began searching them. As for unknown people... militiamen let them go without asking their names.

There were some labels "Freedom March-2" and two signs "Freedom March-2" found by militiamen in the bags of the students. Militiamen in no way reacted to the protests and questions about the grounds for detention. When the boys asked permission to telephone the parents and inform them about what happened to them militiamen said in response that it was not a detention but simply ordinary talk.

Boys also offered to militiamen to phone their chief to make certain of decision that the City authorities sanctioned "Freedom March-2". Having phoned militiamen at parting suggested Andrus and Syargei "hiding away" in case boys would meet them and added: "If we were not in militia uniform you wouldn't leave this room alive."

Got under "press"...

Political prisoner Uladzimir Kudzinaw got seven days of a penalty isolator

Prisoner of conscience Uladzimir Kudzinaw, deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation, who actually has been doing his term in prison since autumn 1997, got seven days of a penalty isolator. As it became known U.Kudzinaw was punished for the following violation of the prison order. After morning physical exercises U.Kudzinaw went together with his cellmates to smoke. Custody guard Karulin passing by saw U.Kudzinaw smoking. He didn't like something and that's why rushed to U.Kudzinaw pushing other prisoners apart. As it turned out Karulin didn't like the way U.Kudzinaw was smoking. He accused U.Kudzinaw of starting smoking to early. It was clearly seen that Karulin was interested only in U.Kudzinaw's personality for he didn't make any remarks to other prisoners. Karulin drew up a report and U.Kudzinaw was immediately put in a penalty isolator.

It should be mentioned that U.Kudzinaw has always had very difficult relations with administration staff of the prison for administration was ready to fulfil any order by security service. That's why when the name of U.Kudzinaw was several times mentioned in independent press there appeared an order to put U.Kudzinaw under so called "press." One after another there appeared different reports about breaking order of the custody regime by the deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet. For example, when U.Kudzinaw was ill and couldn't change his bedlinen, or when he didn't know that custody administration crossed his name out of the prison chess tournament there were drawn such reports.

These very intensive searching of "regime violations" are connected with forthcoming amnesty. Administration of the prison needs to have such "violations" in order not to put U.Kudzinaw to the list of amnestied people.

It should be mentioned also that U.Kudzinaw's state of health has considerably worsened. It is proved by the fact that he has lost 40 kilograms since his imprisonment.

"How it was?"

Human rights organisation "Legal Assistance to the Population" presented a special issue of the independent investigation titled "How it was?" dedicated to the developments that took place in Minsk on 17 October 1999 – the day when the Freedom March-1 was held. This special issue is a collection of publications in press, documents, and witnesses' testimonies. Aleg Vouchak chairman of "Legal Assistance to the Population" told how this issue was prepared. People suffered from actions of special militia troops on 17 October told what happened to them. Among these people were Alexander Shchurko, Uladzimir Zvernik, Dzyanis Charnow – son of Uladzimir Charnow that got political asylum in Holland. Well-known human rights activists also took floor. Deputy chairman of the HRC "Viasna" Valyantsin Stefanovich was invited to the presentation.



Aleg Vouchak and Valyantsin Stefanovich.

One hundred days being released

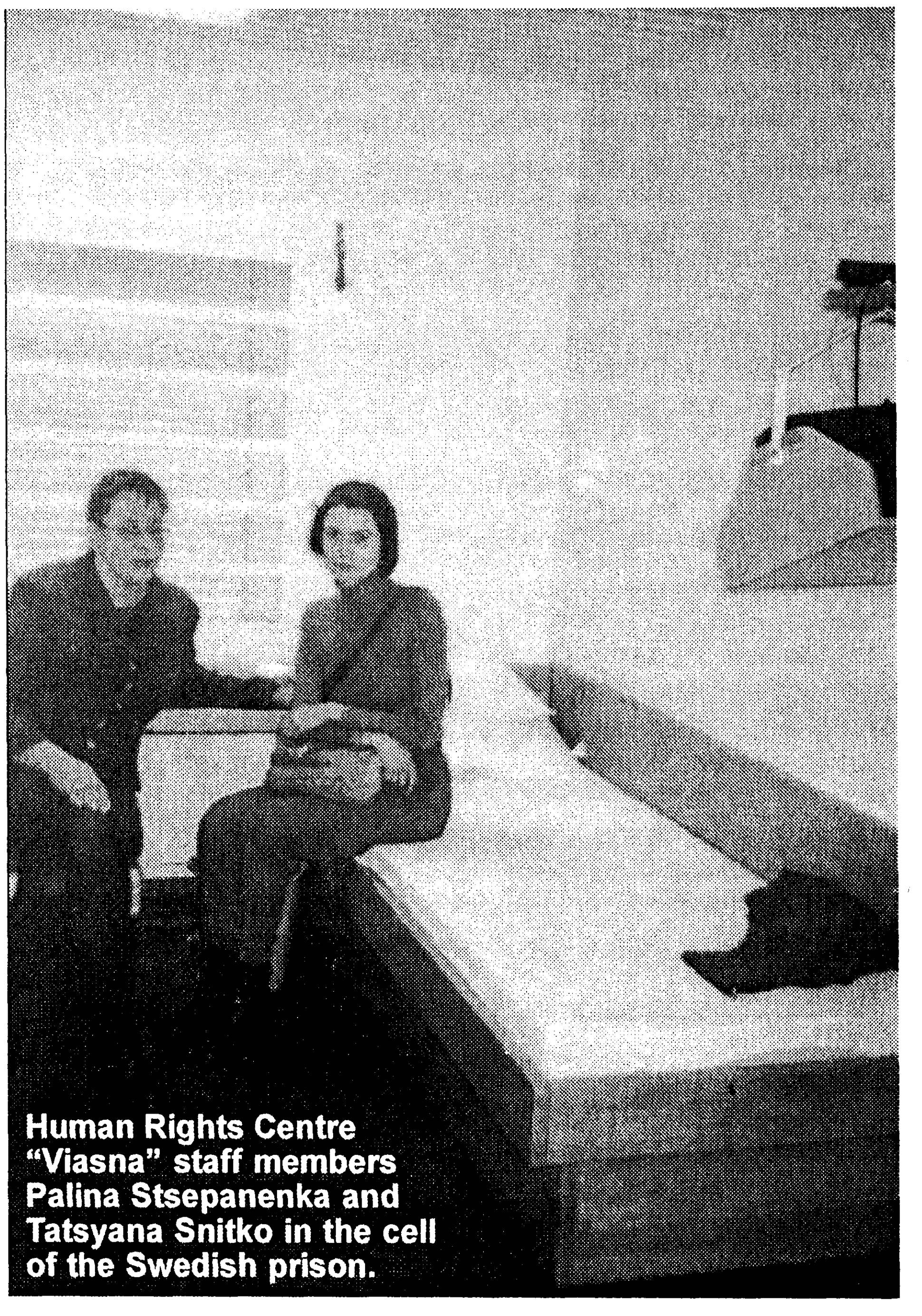
Vasil Staravoitaw, well-known and respected man in the country, Hero of the Socialist Labour, chairman of the famous collective farm "Rassvet" of the Magilew district did two years in prison under far-fetched accusation (to be exact he was sentenced due to personal envy and revenge of A.Lukashenka. "The Right to Freedom" wrote about it several times). One hundred days after his release lawyer V.Stramkowskaya organised a press conference with participation of her client. It should be mentioned also while defending V.Staravoitaw Prosecutor's Office simultaneously instituted criminal proceedings against Vera Stramkowskaya. Press conference was held in the headquarters of the Centre for Human Rights (V.Starmkowskaya is a chairwoman of it). Vasil Staravoitaw shared his fillings and impressions of returning to the civil life, to his home village and collective farm and of course about history of his arrest. Vasil Staravoitaw was quite certain that current regime is not eternal. He said with confidence that Belarus would soon get rid off totalitarian chains.



Vasil Staravoitaw and Vera Staramkowskaya.

Inside look at Sweden

Collaboration and experience exchange of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" with its western partner is going on. At the beginning of March human rights activists from Belarus spent a week in democratic Sweden. They were invited by peace-making organisation Svenska Freds. Svenska Freds has been working with society problems, democratisation and peaceful conflict solution more than a hundred years. For example, it keeps under observation such unstable regions of Europe like the countries of former Yugoslavia and Russia. Swedish peacemakers struggle for armament reduce and against use of certain kinds of weapon (such as anti-personal mines). Struggle for peace and human rights is a traditional thing for Sweden: this country has not participated in wars for one hundred eighty years. Belarusan delegation was made u p of representatives of Belarusan regions. The Belarusans were very active in Sweden: during the week they held quite a number of meetings with Swedish schoolchildren, students, teachers, journalists, lawyers, parliament members, and even policemen. Swedish people showed great interest to Belarus everywhere, so our delegates could ask questions about the country they were visiting.



Human Rights Centre "Viasna" staff members Palina Stsepanenka and Tatsyana Snitko in the cell of the Swedish prison.

Swedish prison

We got to prison on the ve-ry first day of our visit. Like clients. But it was just an excursion. A guest from a post-Soviet country at first can take a Stockholm investigation isolator for a hospital or a hotel. There was a building near the "hotel." First I was making pictures of it as it looked like an architectural masterpiece, a temple or a university. Then it turned out to be Stockholm City Police Department.

The prison Kronabergshektet in Stockholm and our custody in Valadarski Street have nothing in common. There is nobody in the hall there. There is no long queue of tired and nervous relatives of the prisoners who are afraid to be late for the meeting, to fail to pass a parcel or miss an appointment with a chief... Instead of them, there is a glass partition, two guards on duty and some visitors. One of the visitors is talking on the telephone – two ladies with a carriage and a kid are talking to each other and smiling.

The Kronabergshektet prison looks new, though it was built in 1975. At first we couldn't trust our eyes and words of the security chief Mats Landebrink. For example, I couldn't realise how 60 per cent of the prisoners can be allowed to send and receive letters, see relations once a wee. And besides, the letters are drug tested and remain unread. First, Belarusan security guards like to be letter-censors. Second, here in Belarus I couldn't get letters and New Year cards for almost 3 months. As for the letter from Ales Pushkin, Belarusan artist, it disappeared from the sealed envelope. So, Swedish mail is better even in prison.

Mr Landebrink couldn't understand some questions as well. He wondered how security guard reading mails could help the investigation process. In Sweden it is Prosecution Office to decide whether correspondence can hamper the investigation process and prison administration is to submit it to the Prosecution Office.

After the talk about the conditions in the Kronabergshektet prison and other prisons, security chief assistant showed us a lot of different rooms of that institution. I will say some more words about it later. That is another question. The fact is that few of our hotels can compete by living conditions with a Swedish prison.

Swedish schools

Sweden has got a 9-year secondary school compulsory for all children. Then most of teenagers go to different high schools. Generally they have one or several main subjects. They can be social sciences, economics, sport, or a foreign language. Usually we talked to high school students specialising in different fields of science. But some times we met with high school and university students and also international institute post graduate students. We were invited to appear in public in different regions and suburbs of Stockholm, in the cities of Upsala, Arebra, Skowder and some others.

Our delegation couldn't get to all the discussions and seminars we were invited to by students and their teachers. So we decided to separate into groups. Every group had Russian-speaking member of Svenska Freds. Sometimes we were surprised by Swedish teenagers who asked us to talk in the Belarusan language to compare two Slavonic languages. Swedish people were struck by the beauty and at the same time incomprehensiveness of our language even for the interpreters from Russian. Very often I was to talk about the history of Belarus, the Chernobyl disaster and just show the country on the map.

Several times before the talk we tried to ask people what they knew about Belarus and who knew Belarusan famous people. As I could see the first well-known person there is Volga Korbut. Two different pupils from two different schools told me that the famous gymnastics world champion was tenderly called "Sparrow from Minsk." For number of

people our country is associated with Chernobyl disaster and our President A.Lukashenka. Sometimes Belarus was mixed up with the Ukraine, when the football player Andrei Shevchenko, pole-vaulter Sergei Bubka and even... today's president Leanid Kuchma were mentioned.

Later the teachers told us that after our meetings their pupils looked for name "Belarus" in Internet and encyclopaedic dictionaries...

We showed the episodes of the film "Fear" in some educational institutions. Then talked about the destiny of some film's heroes: Lyavonaw, Klimaw, Ganchar... Some times we were asked questions about present situation in our country. Swedish youth most often was interested and therefore asked questions about future elections in Belarus, whether we had problems going abroad, how the Belarusan youth see the future of their country, what problems we'll face when back home.

Meeting human rights activists

We met human rights activists in different cities of Sweden. They were representatives of different organisations, including Amnesty International, Swedish organisation SPAS and Swedish department of Helsinki Committee. Actually those were people knowing ins and outs of Belarus and sometimes asked quite tricky questions about our realities. We took part in several seminars and discussions about human rights in Belarus. Amnesty International invited "Viasna" representatives to its annual session in August 2000. One more thing I was surprised at is that there were a lot of teachers among the members of human rights organisations in Sweden. On the opposite if they lived in Belarus they could lose their job for "involving children in politics."

Meeting journalists

When we visited some of cities of Sweden, several Swedish newspapers had time to write about our delegation. At the same time there was information of Belarus and its political situation in the Swedish newspapers. We were dealing with reporters constantly; at least all our three interpreters have had this experience and had been to Belarus.

Visiting the city of Arebrs, one of our groups held a big press conference.

The largest and most detailed interviews with "Viasna" representatives were probably made by Russian-speaking "Radio of Sweden" and Swedish-speaking magazine "Pax".

The Swedish press is quite opposite to ours. Firstly, by appearance: it is colourful with photos; secondly, freedom of speech exists and functions there unlike in Belarus. The papers are not characterised there like "state" and "private," but more precisely in accordance with its belonging to a certain political party or movement, like "social-democratic," "independent," "liberal," "right" and so on.

The most popular Swedish paper is the daily paper of a large circulation "Metro." You can get it free in metro. There is a special magazine for unemployed people. It is edited specially for the unemployed to sell it in public transport and earn this way at least something.

Swedish "Nyamiga"

Last autumn Sweden also faced a tragedy, which brought a lot of victims. It is strange but the number of young people dead is approximately the same as in Belarus: about 60 people. But the difference of the feasts on which the tragedies happened is quite considerable. Our children died at the concert St. Trinity and Swedish in the city of Goteborgh at the disco on Halloween. In western countries Halloween coincides with our religious feast Dziady. The souls of dead are considered to come out on the Earth together with the Evil Spirit making troubles.

Today there are several young men in the Gцteborgh prison, accused of the disco building arson. First this arson was considered to be made by the fascists of the city, as most victims were emigrants or emigrants' descendants. But this version was rejected during the investigation. The trial is expected to dot 'i's' in this case in a month time. And now the parents of the children died in the tragedy, as well as the Belarusan parents unite into their organisation. Like in Minsk, they create their memorial centre, they write a book about them.

Reichstag

Swedish parliament is called Reichstag. Out of its 349 members (indeed elected by the people, unlike in Lukashenka's National Assembly), 131 members are the representatives of Social-Democratic Party. Social Democrats are called the leading party as they have majority in the parliament. The other parties in Reichstag are the left wing (ex-communists), the moderate (the right wing in the past), Christian Democratic Party and the agrarian party, liberals and "greens."

Belarusan guests met the representative of Social Democrats in the Swedish parliament Tone Tsingsgard. Mrs Tsingsgard is a member of the defence committee, which is debating about the governmental proposal of disarmament. It's quite interesting that 44 per cent of the governmental bodies' members are women.

Belarusan human rights activists answered the questions of Reichstag representatives. Mrs Tsingsgard said that recently the in-parliament organisation "Belarus-Sweden" was created. Our country has become interesting for Sweden, though before much attention was paid to democracy development in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

On the day of our visit to Reichstag, a delegation of European Union representatives came to Stockholm to be consulted by the Swedish parliament members about the high-level discussion of the Belarusan problems, which are going to be held in the nearest future.

After the talk to the parliament member we were on excursion in Reichstag. But we were not alone. On that day there were Swedish students there. According to the Swedish law every citizen has a right to visit the parliament hall and listen to the debates and questions discussed. In order to get to our Belarusan parliament even a journalists have to get a special pass. But now it's quite difficult, you will not get a pass and besides, who will go the dictatorial parliament it's not interesting to anybody...

Tatsyana SNITKO

Special services are working hard...

Human Rights Centre "Viasna" was addressed by Miraslaw Lazowski on 2 March. Miraslaw Lazowski reported that he was detained by militia in metro station "Kastrychnitskaya" and taken to the charge office where militia officer drew up a charge sheet about his detention for spreading leaflets of non-registered organisation "White Legion". After that M.Lazowski was taken to the Minsk Leninski Administration of Internal Affairs. In Leninski Administration of Internal Affairs Miraslaw Lazowski spent a night speaking to the KGB officials that were called by militiamen. This talk was not recorded or taken down in shorthand. The KGB officials were interested in personality of M.Lazowski, M.Lazowski's friends and etc.

On the following day, March 2, the detained was taken to the Leninski District Court where the judge Zhdanok brought a verdict to him. M.Lazowski was fined 15 minimum wages. But M.Lazowsli's adventure didn't stop. After it he was brought to the Pershamaiski District Administration of Internal Affairs (PDAID) of Minsk City where he had a talk with deputy head of the PDAIA. The militia officer was unsatisfied with activities of Minsk youngsters who stick on their leaflets everywhere. In Pershamaiski Administration of Internal Affairs M.Lazowski was drawn up another charge sheet under article 172 (p.3) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus – distributing printed products without imprint data. These materials were submitted to the administrative commission of the Pershamaiski District's administration. The detention and punishment of M.Lazowski are the evidence of law-enforcement agencies' special attention to the youth organisations' activities on the eve of "Hot Spring-2000."

Information department of the HRC "Viasna".

P.S. HRC "Viasna" hasn't got any information of Russian National Unity active members' detentions who stuck on their leaflets all over the Minsk City...

EVENTS FACTS COMMENTS

(Beginning on p.1)

On 29 February, next in turn round of court hearings of G.Samoilenka's justifying case took place in Brest. The point is Mr. Samoilenka had done ten days in detention. But his civil rights were violated during a trial before his detention. G.Samoilenka was accused without defence and without witnesses. The Brest Regional Court disaffirmed the decision made by the Brest City Court. So the case was directed to the Brest City Court back to be re-examined. Yawgen Byalasin, a witness, was witnessing in the Belarusan language (one of the two official languages in Belarus) during court sitting but he was proposed to speak Russian. Yawgen turned down this proposal. After it the break was declared during which the judge M.Shapatsyuk tried to find an interpreter. But the judge failed to find anybody speaking Belarusan language in the Leninski Administration of Internal Affairs and was forced to postpone the hearings till indefinite time.

On 29 February, the Minsk Regional Court disaffirmed the decision made by the Saligorsk District and City Court concerning the case of Valyantsin Baranaw, active member of the BPF "Adradzhennie." According to the court verdict Valyantsin Baranaw was fined 29 million roubles for organisation of the unauthorised meeting and rally in the village Chyrvonaya Slabada on 28 November 1999. It should be mentioned that every year on 28 November people from Belarus' different places come to Slutsk to mark an anniversary of the anti-Bolshevik rebellion, which took place in 1920 in the Slutsk district. People visit villages where the fighting with Bolshevik army took place; they do prayer for the dead sons of Belarus and sing the patriotic songs, lay the wreaths on a symbolic grave. Since 1994 in fact every trip of people who are not indifferent to the history of their country and to its heroes has been conducted with number of obstacles done by the authorities. Some years running celebrating people have been detained and accused of conducting unauthorised rallies and meetings. It was so two years ago when the active members of the BPF M.Antsypovich and G.Bankevich were brought to book. But the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus disaffirmed the decision made by the Slutsk City Court because of many violations of the law and court procedure. Thus, the Supreme Court made the Slutsk Court reconsider the case of M.Antsypovich and G.Bankevich. It goes without saying that the case was terminated for luck of corpus delicti. The same scenario has been performed this year. But it differs from the previous one in one small thing – this time there was only one victim. It was V.Baranaw. After Valyntsin Baranaw was found guilty of organising unauthorised rally and meeting and fined he addressed the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" and with the assistance of a lawyer lodged a complaint and addressed it to the Minsk Regional Court. As result the Saligorsk City Court was forced to reconsider the case. Now the legal process is in action and it is still unclear whether Mr Baranaw would win and prove his innocence...

On 1 March, the Minsk Prosecutor's Office submitted to the Minsk City Court a criminal case instituted against four participants of the 17 October Freedom March. These four "criminals" were G.Sushkevich, G.Dogil, A.Lazaraw, and A.Valabuew. Young people are accused under two articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus: art. 186.3 (organisation and participation in mass action breaking social order) and art. 201 (p.2) – malicious hooliganism. Two videocassettes and two pieces of a pavement stone are enclosed to the case as material evidences.

On 1 March, unauthorised picket was held near the President's residency in Minsk. Picket participants – Tsimaphei Dranchuk, Pilip Klikushyn and Lyavon Malakhaw demanded the authorities to hold an inquiry into disappearance of the prominent Belarusan politicians Viktar Ganchar, Yury Zakharanka and businessman Anatol Krasowski. All the participants and some journalists present – Algerd Nevyarowski (Radio "Freedom"), Ruslan Batsyankow (BelaPAN), Vasil Fyadosenka (Reuter) – were detained and taken to the Minsk Leninski District Administration of Internal Affairs. The journalists were released one hour after detention. As for the rest picket participants they all were drawn charge sheets. And currently they are charged with committing small-minded hooliganism. The administrative case was examined by the Minsk Leninski District Court. Each of the detained was sentenced to five days of administrative detention. On 3 March in the evening while taking the arrested to the custody centre militia officers of the Minsk Leninski Administration of Internal Affairs groundlessly used force against Tsimaphei Dranchuk and stroke his head against the militia car. They broke Tsimaphei Dranchuk's spectacles. The arrested got a cranium trauma, which later reflected on his health state. On 5 March the state of Tsimaphei suddenly became worse. Tsimaphei was taken to the clinical hospital №3 where the diagnosis was confirmed. So 18-year old Tsimaphei Dranchukwas was released ahead of schedule. The rest picket participants – Leanid Malakhaw and Pilip Klikushyn – were set free on 8 March when they did their term in full.

On 2 March, a meeting organised by the Byelorussian Association of Jewish Organisations and Communities and Byelorussian Association of Jews – former prisoners of Nazi ghettos and concentration camps was held in Minsk. It was authorised by the Minsk City Executive Committee. The meeting was conducted near the memorial "Yama" in Zaslawskaya Street and was dedicated to the 58th anniversary of the tragedy, which took place on 2 March 1942, when the German Fascists executed by shooting 5000 prisoners of Minsk ghetto including 200 orphans from children's home together the teachers and medical personnel.

At the beginning of March it became known that Aleg Baturyn, former militia officer is now in Poland. He made a sensational statement about provocation done by the special militia troops and special intelligence services on 17 October 1999. In his interview to the Polish newspaper Aleg Baturyn said that he worried about his family in Belarus. According to Aleg Baturyn he doesn't know yet how much time he will spend in Poland. But there is an information that he is going to ask for political asylum in the USA.

On 4 March, a tragedy occurred during celebration of the Belarusan Militia Day in Minsk. The party dedicated to this "holiday" was conducted at disco club "Spyavayuchya fantany" (singing fountains). And in the middle of it the tragedy happened: lieutenant F.Liphanaw, officer of a special militia detachment "Almaz" being drunk shot up one of his colleagues and injured three more officers of this detachment. Yuri Sivakow, Minister of Internal Affairs, said commenting on this incident that people responsible for moral and mental state of militia officers and those who were in charge of special militia troops had been fired.

On 5 March, Iryna Slawnikava, journalist of the independent newspaper "Belaruskaya Maladziozhnaya," was detained by the militia officers at metro station "Maskowskaya." Formal reason for detention was label with inscription "Game over," which she had stuck on the wall of metro station. There was depicted a man riding a hockey stick being kicked by the leg in boot and white-red-white sock (national colours) on the label. Iryna Slawnikava was taken to the charge office where she was asked following question: "What for did you stick on Alexander Lukashenka?" She replied: "Where do you see Alexander Lukashenka?" Answering questions Iryna Slawnikava spent an hour and a half in the charge office. Militia officer drew up a charge sheet of her detention. According to it Iryna Slawnikava had broken the article 143 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus – sticking on announcements in the restricted spots.

On 6 March, a delegation of Belarusan opposition politicians visited Stockholm. Our politicians met with different representatives of the governmental bodies, public and non-governmental organisations. Following prominent politicians formed a part of this delegation: A.Sannikaw – coordinator of Charter-97, S.Bagdankevich – chairman of the United Civic Party, V.Vyachorka – chairman of the Belarusan Popular Front "Adradzhennie," Anatol Lyabedzka – vice-speaker of the 13th Supreme Soviet (who at last got a passport and could go abroad), V.Ivashkevich – vice-president of the Belarusan Independent Trade Unions' Congress, A.Karol – deputy chairman of the Belarusan Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Gramada" (Mikola Statkevich – its chairman was not allowed to go abroad), S.Domash – chairman of the public association "Grodzenskiya intsiyatyvy" (Grodna's initiatives), Zh.Litsvina – president of the Belarusan Association of Journalists. Belarusan politicians and public leaders told about what is going on in Belarus on the meetings of different level. Particularly they paid much attention to the violations of human rights in our country and prospects of round-table talks between Belarusan authorities and opposition.

On 7 March, Human Rights Centre "Viasna" in association with public organisation "Legal Assistance to the Population" and public organisation "Centre for Human Rights" made a joint declaration and directed it to the independent mass media. It's said in the declaration: "We are deeply concerned with the state of human rights in the country and in connection with it on the eve of mass actions of protest of Belarusan citizens:



Minsk, 9 March – political prisoner Andrei Klimaw in the court room; USA ambassador to Belarus Daniel Speckhard (on the right) speaking to A.Klimaw's wife Tatsyana.



— we call all the state bodies, public organisations and associations to carry out their activities within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus;

— we insist on avoiding using violent actions and force when suppressing peaceful rallies and demonstrations;

— we call all democratic parties and organisations to combine their efforts for the benefit of creating civic society as a basic element of democratic Belarus;

— we do condemn the practice of suppressing differently minded people in all its manifestations."

Human rights organisations expressed their readiness to give legal and information assistance to people whose rights were violated.

On 7 March, investigator of the Minsk Prosecutor's Office Pheshchanka V.A. made a decision concerning the fate of Mikola Statkevich, chairman of the Belarusan Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Gramada." Mr Phecshchanka found M.Statkevich guilty of "committing a crime." The point is Mikola Statkevich took part in mass actions of protest on 27 July 1999 and on 17 October 1999. Minsk Prosecutor's Office instituted criminal proceedings against M.Statkevich for participation in the actions mentioned above. According to the investigation resolution M.Statkevich is accused of breaking the art. 186.3 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (organisation or active participation in mass actions breaking social order). The verdict brought by the investigation says, "M.Statkevich being one of the organisers of the demonstration on 27 July 1999 called meeting participants to change a route set by the Minsk City Executive Committee." Almost the same "crime" M.Statkevich is incriminated for his actions on 17 October when he called marchers to go to the Bangalor Square along the Minsk streets what is "pure organisation of unauthorised rally." V.Shchuking was found guilty of committing the same "crime." The investigation process is over and now M.Statkevich and V.Shchukin are getting acquainted with the investigation materials. Soon the case is going to be submitted to the Minsk City Court and a date of one more political process will be fixed.

On 9 March, as it was decided before a court verdict had to be brought to the prisoner of conscience Andrei Klimaw, deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet, and to eight employees of A.Klimaw's firm. But Vera Tupick, the judge, having heard the last speech for the defence done by one of the defendants Mr Kalatsilin obviously needed a time to make a decision for she postponed final court verdict till 17 March.

On 10 March, a videoconference was held in the location of the USA Embassy. A lot of well-known people took part in it. Among them were Gerald Coh, a secretary of the US State Department on democracy and human rights, and representatives of Belarusan human rights organisations – Valyantsin Stefanovich (HRC "Viasna"), Tatsyana Protska (Belarusan Helsinki Committee), Aleg Vouchak (Legal Assistance to the Population), Vera Stramkowskaya (Centre for Human Rights) and Zmitsr Bandarenka (Charter-97). This meeting was held after the special session of the US Congress dedicated to the human rights problems in Belarus. Belarusan representatives spoke out during the meeting about today's problems in the field of human rights in Belarus. The meeting participants also touched the question of so called "dialog" between opposition and Belarusan authorities. Human rights activists pointed out that no human rights organisation was invited to take hand in this dialog. It was also mentioned that this dialog didn't improve the situation in the field of human rights in the country. Mr Coh voiced Bill Clinton and Madlen Allbright's symphasy to the Belarusan human rights organisations.

On 13 March, Ross Wilson – new independent states Adviser to the Secretary of the United States, during his visit to Belarus met with relations of disappeared politicians and whose relatives are kept behind bars for political reasons. Among these people were Zoya Kudzinava (Uladzimir Kudzinaw's wife), Tatsyana Klimava (Andrei Klimaw's wife), Svyatlana Ulasava (Vasil Lyavonaw's daughter), Zinaida Ganchar (Viktar Ganchar's wife), Volga Zakharanka (Yury Zakharanka's wife). All the women told about their problems, they describe the situation with human rights in Belarus. Meeting participants also pointed out that there is no independent judicial power in the country and in fact there are no independent lawyers. Women expressed concern about health state of their relatives and about bad custody conditions. Ross Wilson was greatly surprised that in the end of the XX century in the middle of Europe human rights are violated in such way and scale (people disappear). Ross Wilson turned to the Belarusan authorities with request to abide by international standards in the field of human rights and the norms of international humanitarian law. He also asked Belarusan authorities not to use force against "Freedom March-2" participants.

On 14 March, a legal action against A.Pikula – chairman of Baranavichy City Council of the Belarusan Popular Front "Adradzhennie" successfully ended. Let's recall the story that happened to A.Pikula. On 22 October 1999, A.Pikula was severely beaten up by militia officers for crying out "Long live Belarus!" (see "The Right to Freedom" №2, 2000). Ales Pikula was kept three days in militia isolator with heavily injured hand. After it he was fined under Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus – small-minded hooliganism. A.Pikula appealed to the chief judge of the Brest Regional Court with complaint. Brest Regional Court disaffirmed decision made by the Baranavichy City Court and ordered to reconsider the case of A.Pikula. Repeated court session of Branavichy City Court was held on 14 March. After brilliant speech for a defence done by the lawyer Zoya Gawdzei Mrs Zh.M.Kapachewskaya, a judge, was forced to admit that there were no grounds to bring A.Pikula to book. Final verdict said: "to terminate the case for a lack of corpus delicti." It was possible to get justifying verdict due to five-month long struggle of the local branch activists of the HRC "Viasna" and lawyer Z.Gawdzei particularly.

On 15 March, opposition-organised action called "Freedom March-2" was held in Minsk. It was dedicated to the Constitution Day. Around fifty thousands of people took hand in it according to eye-witnesses (according to Belarusan TV there was just five thousand people, according to Russian TV-channels – more than twenty thousands). In the whole the first action of the "Hot spring-2000" had no special incidents. Though before the "Freedom March-2" started a young man (later he turned out to be the 2nd year student of the Geography Department of the Belarus' State University Syargei Kazlow) rushed to the reporter of the Russian TV company NTV Alexander Kolpakov and hit him in the face. Kazlow claimed to disagree with the NTV interpretation of the war in Chechnya. The provoker was detained by the participants of the "Freedom March-2" themselves not by militia. Among them were Ales Danilchyk, a monitor of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" and correspondent of the agency "Interfax" Vera Tryzna. The detained was taken by militia car to the Minsk Savetski Administration of Internal affairs. The militia instituted criminal proceedings against Syargei Kazlow under art. 201 (p.2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus – malicious hooliganism.

ALES ASTROUSKI: "MY ATTEMPT TO DISCUSS THE RUSSIAN-BELARUSAN UNION"

At the end of February the editorial board of "The Right to Freedom" got a letter from a well-known professor of Grodna Medical University Ales Astrouski, in which he tells us about some last-year events, shares his opinion and gives advice to the participants of the opposition-organised mass-actions. This letter seems very interesting and we offer it to our readers.

The results of the project of "Russian-Belarusan Union" discussion were given to Belarusan people inadequately. The official mass media report that 95 per cent of our society agree with the Union idea. But in Grodna from 95 to 100 per cent of many working-people groups voted "against." This happened when people unpressed were making independent decisions.

The attempts of the opposition members to take part in the discussion were prevented by the authorities. Representatives of the Belarusan Popular Front (BPF), Belarusan Social Democratic Party (BSDP) and Belarusan Social Democratic Gramada in Grodna were not allowed to appear on TV and radio in spite of the applications presented in advance in accordance with the regulations established. Even pickets were prohibited. The authorities persecuted the people distributing leaflets. They were grabbed, got protocols drawn up against them, then tried in courts. Formally, the reason for their detention was absence circulation number and printing-house address on the leaflets. Sometimes the voting and even the discussion in certain establishments were cancelled in order not to allow public discussion as it happened in Grodna State University and Medical University.

Therefore to take part in the discussion I decided to use the meeting held to support the "Union" and President A.Lukashenka by Belarusan Patriotic Union of Youth (BPUY) on November 20, 1999. But at the very beginning of the meeting I understood they wouldn't allow me to take floor, because the meeting and everything in it was from the very beginning thoroughly planed. More than a thousand students were made to come there in stead of attending their classes at schools, technical colleges and universities. I spent there half an hour. Fortunately I didn't waste the time.

Nor our people wasted time during the meeting. By the time it was over a lot of people were holding leaflets with the contest opposite to the subject matter of the meeting. I was going to go home when I noticed the deputy chief of the Grodna BPF Council Alexander Mikhalchyk, surrounded by 5-6 young men in civilian clothes. He was trying to explain them something. Later they turned out to be militiamen, who detained him for distributing leaflets. But I first thought they were members of the BPUY or Russian National Unity (RNU) and to prevent a possible scandal tried to get him out.

As a result we were arrested and like thousands of our citizens underwent a number of illegal actions of the militia:

— Ministry of Internal Affairs employees didn't show their certificates (therefore I first thought they were hooligans until I saw a militiaman in the uniform);

— They didn't say what we were accused of (the only reply for my question of the kind was: "You'll know it in the Administration of Internal Affairs Department");

— They even tried to accuse me of being drunk;

— No lawyer consulted us in the Administration of Internal Affairs Department;

— We couldn't phone to our families to say were we had got to.

Therefore those two days spent in the isolation ward I didn't talk to militiamen: didn't answer their questions, didn't sign the papers they gave me, didn't eat, etc.

The conditions of the similar imprisonment were perfectly described in details by V.Shchukin. I will add only one thing: the water condensed on the ceiling was falling down on the face, interrupting the sleep several times during the night.

But the most terrible thing was the court, where swearing to tell the truth the militiamen of the Leninski residential area A.A.Grantsaw, S.U.Litvin, and S.U.Samushchyk were giving false evidence. They promised to present a video record (where I was rushing towards the militiamen, swearing and threatening them while they were showing me their militia certificates, etc.). But they didn't show it for the reason of falling snow (though it wasn't snowing then). The film must have been spoiled by it.

One more interesting thing is that the judge of the Grodna Leninski residential area S.G.Yarashevich sentenced me (not them!), though I proved that the evidences of militiamen were false and contradictory. The sentence was two days in detention, which I had done already in the prison.

So, this attempt to "discuss" the project of the Union gave me some experience, which I didn't have before:

1. You must not bring moral or physical pressure (swear or threaten) to bear upon a man in uniform or the one who shows you militia certificate. In case you did, they will give false evidence in court.
2. You must not come to the opposition actions even being a little bit drunk.
3. You have to support each other during and after the case (in the charge office, in court).
4. You have to know the rules of detention, to require their fulfilment, write down the names of militia officers who exceed their authority.
5. You must not trust today's courts. Therefore all the trials must be open with your lawyer present.

You have to follow these rules because the repression against the opposition tend to spread from Minsk to the whole Belarus.

And one more thing that I would like to add: during the case described above I had such a feeling that our militia is directed not by Belarusan KGB, but by Russian Federal Security Service.

Ales ASTROUSKI
Doctor of medical sciences
Professor

P.S. This story has a continuation. Head of the Medical University P.V.Garelick gave the following order December 18, 1999: "Professor A.A.Astrouski, biology department, was absent for two hours on his working place without a good excuse. That's why I order:

1. To stipulate Professor A.Astrouski for offence of the discipline.

2. To notify Professor A.Astrouski that in case it repeats he will get a more serious punishment including a dismissal.

3. The department chief V.P.Andreew to establish control over the subordinates to follow the discipline and fulfil their duties."

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In this number photos from the Centre "Viasna" archives are used.